

What opportunity should a grading promotion examination provide for every examinee?

To answer the question in the title, that is what opportunities grading offers to kenshi, I will first reflect on my personal experience in taking the successive exams, and after that reason from a more objective perspective, that is *shorinji kempo* as an *educational system*, to relate the examinee's aspirations and motivation to the (high) standards of *shorinji kempo* as a martial art and a discipline of personal development.

from a personal perspective [ref. 1]

In reflection on my own progress and the role exams played, I first of all wish to state that, as written in my essay [ref. 1]:

my attention to shorinji kempo was attracted by the phrase shorinji kempo is an intellectual martial art, and in a time where I worked too hard, spending many hours in front of the computer, and I also had to deal with some personal issues, I started training shorinji kempo at the age of 43, curious whether I could keep up with a group of younger people.

On the occasion of applying for my 4th dan exam, I wrote:

having practiced shorinji kempo for almost twenty years, the main purpose in continuing is still to exercise a proper discipline of mind and body, or in other words the meaning of shorinji kempo may be characterized by the japanese word gyo, in its dual meaning of calling and discipline, or a habit of training responding to a need for movement and a long standing attraction for the martial arts

And I remember how proud I was to reach my 1st dan (black belt) before my 50th birthday, in retrospect competing with my father who obtained his judo black belt at the age of 50, when I was 10 years old, practicing judo at the level of yellow belt. But before that, there were the other gradings, starting with the 5th kyu, and after a somewhat hesitant beginning

after some time, thanks also to appropriate training partners, I felt confident and enthusiast to tackle the challenges in shorinji kempo, that is to participate in a taikai, take grading exams, attend training seminars and even visit hombu for the summer camps, which only strengthened my interest and determination to pursue the path of shorinji kempo

Looking back, my examination experiences were highly influenced, in a positive way, by my training partners, in particular Gil Medeiros, with whom I obtained my 3th dan at Hombu in 2011. These periods of training together before the exams, from 1st kyu to 3th dan, were very intense periods, with personal confrontations, but with great mutual respect and satisfaction.

Equally important for us was how much we enjoyed our performance during the exam, and whether our sensei Hiromi Tojo, for the greatest part of it, looked with an approving smile or not. Our sensei was of utmost importance in our motivation for progress, it was his often implicit consent that gave us the confidence to continue, even though

apart from the (health) benefits, the inherent complexity of the system of techniques shorinji kempo teaches is in itself intriguing and proves to be a constant challenge for learning and improvement.

In comparison, my preparation for my 4th dan exam was a more solitary and to some extent even lonely experience, but I was happy to get to know Mike Moore, branchmaster in Melbourne, with whom I completed the exam in an harmonious and satisfactory manner, another step in the process of learning *shorinji kempo*, as a martial art and even more important as a way to discipline the mind and body.

Finally, I can only say that the slow progression and the struggle to improve the basics of my techniques, in addition to my intellectual understanding, proved to be the utmost challenge, and

I still value to look at shorinji kempo from a beginner's mind, and unrelentingly set myself the goals of improving my techniques, finding a proper way to do techniques together with a partner, and getting above the possible confusion that may occur in randori exercise.

from the perspective of shorinji kempo [ref. 2]

In order to keep the loyalty and respect of the student for *shorinji kempo* as a system of training and, in a wider context, as a world-wide organization of instructors and students, it is important that exams provide a guarantee of quality, with respect to the practice of training, personality development, theoretical knowledge, and above all the mastery of techniques. To this end, as stated in [ref. 2], the *shorinji kempo* grade system is meant

to evaluate if the examinee has developed techniques, knowledge, and personality to the required level and successfully shown that during the examination

However, for the practicing kenshi, whatever age, it may be said that an exam is part of

a process, not the end, but in some sense the beginning

In other words, *shorinji kempo* is

like climbing a stair step by step, and the grade system marks milestones of training

For kenshi taking an exam, self-confidence is gained by learning to comply with the rules, to develop the proper attitudes, and the ability to demonstrate adequate mastery of the techniques, as well as their knowledge of foundations and principles of *shorinji kempo*.

In my experience, the sensei plays an essential role in this process, through his relation with the kenshi, as a close observer of his/her process of personal development and technical progress. Ideally, the exam is an element in the process, that stimulates the kenshi to

learn from the evaluation

At the seminar, a pre-exam was suggested, as a means to establish whether the kenshi meets the preliminary requirements of an exam in terms of a proper level of knowledge, techniques, and skills to apply the techniques in embu and randori. Whatever level, though, basic techniques are of utmost importance, including position, stance and body movement in goho, and balance and protection methods in juho, each according to the potential and physical capabilities of the examinee.

In conclusion, from the outset there must be a mutual agreement between the instructor (sensei) and the pupil (kenshi) that exams are not just a formality, but explicitly meant as a quality guarantee, to make sure that the high standards that *shorinji kempo* requires are not compromised. Only in this way may *shorinji kempo* truly serve its goals, that is create better people by developing a proper discipline of mind and body.

reference(s)

1. [homework dan 4¹]: What I have gained in training shorinji kempo
2. Examiner & Judge Qualification Session Information Materials

This report is written to satisfy the requirements of the Examiner & Judge Qualification Seminar at the WSKO training camp at Tadotsu, 17-20 march, 2015.

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online version: sk.eliens.net/report-exam.html

¹sk.eliens.net/essay-dan-4.html